

'Repentance'

by A.W. Tozer

A.W. Tozer emphasizes the necessity of true repentance and contrition for spiritual growth and reliance on God's mercy in the new year.

Scripture: Psalm 51:1

Topics: "God's Mercy", "Repentance"

Description

A.W. Tozer emphasizes the significance of true repentance in his sermon, drawing from Psalm 51, where David pleads for God's mercy. He explains that repentance is not a one-time act but a continuous state of contrition, requiring a realistic self-judgment and a determination to change. Tozer warns against inadequate repentance, which leads to a cycle of sin without remorse, and contrasts it with the hope found in God's mercy. He encourages believers to enter the new year with a spirit of cheerful contrition, trusting in God's loving kindness and forgiveness. Ultimately, Tozer calls for a balance of sorrow for sin and joyful confidence in God's grace.

Transcript

"Repentance"

January 4, 1959

Now, I want to talk today, this morning before the communion, on the 51st Psalm. We read it previously, perhaps a few of you came in late for it, very few. But it's the 51st Psalm, and David that starts out, to have mercy upon me O God according to Thy lovingkindness and according unto the multitude of a tender mercies blot out my transgressions.

Now, we come to the communion service, the first communion service of the New Year. And of course, we entered the new year. It's 1959, the first Sunday of the new year. And there are some things we want from God and we want them legitimately. They are not the whimpering of spoiled children. They are the legitimate and appropriate desires of mature Christians. I'll name about five or six things that we want. We want protection during this coming year. You and I can no more dare face the year without the protection of God than we dare face a thunderstorm or a blizzard without shelter.

Then we want guidance during this coming year. Every one of us will want guidance. We want personal guidance and we want providential guidance, because you will be sought, and your exploitation will be

attempted by 10,000 persons who want to make something of you. You will be asked here and there, you will be. Suggestions will be offered to you by the scores, and you want guidance. And you have a right to want prosperity. Not financial prosperity necessarily, though that is not even wrong to desire that we might prosper financially.

Then we hope you will want growth. We hope you will want to fulfill the Scripture that says, but grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. And we hope you'll want to make spiritual progress and advance in holiness. If you do, I believe you're in the will of God. If you do not, then I'm afraid you have wasted the last year, because last year should have made us desirous of having spiritual progress the next year. And then this year we're now in should prepare us to want more spiritual progress in the years that may lie ahead. And if we do not I say, if we are languid and perfunctory about all this, if even one of us, even one of us, it's all then, we have wasted last year to a large degree. We have lived like a turtle or some other animal that barely vegetated. We have spiritually, merely vegetated, merely stayed alive.

Then, if this is true, and I think it is true that we do want during this time, a protection and guidance and prosperity and growth in grace and spirit to make spiritual progress and to advance in holiness and likeness to God, then one quality must be present to assure these benefits. And that one quality is true repentance, contrition. I wonder why we can't see this, that repentance is not something you do and get over with. Repentance is something you feel. It is a state. It is contrition. And contrition is not something you feel and then get over with as you might take a shot of penicillin soon, to cure, to kill the bugs inside your blood and heal you have, a disease and then forget it. We cannot thus think of contrition. Contrition is rather a permanent state of mind. Flaring up or dying down as a fire might a little as we go along, but always present. The glow of it ought to be in our hearts always and it must be.

The 51st Psalm is a classic example of contrition. It had a historic reason for it. But it created a mood in which David lived. And we do well to let this Psalm create a mood for us. And to try to keep that mood, it's far better than to try to seek comfort this coming year. If you will have decided, or secretly even decided that you're going to enjoy yourself more this year, that you're hoping to have more comforts, more conveniences and a better state of affairs, so you'll comfort yourself and live better, then you haven't properly, you haven't learned Christ yet, as you should.

Now to enjoy ourselves, that's the counsel of unbelief, to desire to do better, feel better, to be more consoled and to rest more and relax more and work less and have more of the comforts which we tell ourselves we have well, well earned. All right, if that's your plan for the coming year, then that's the counsel of unbelief. That's, that's what the rich man wanted. That's what Demus was wanted. But that isn't what the children of God ought to want. We ought to want guidance and protection and spiritual growth and advance in holiness whether we're comforted or not. I don't care whether I feel good this year or not. You know, you can get so busy with God, you don't notice whether you're feeling good or not. And if somebody asks you, how do you feel, you have to stop and ask and consult yourself to see if it's worth the problem?

Well, this contrition is found here in Psalm 51. There are two things I want you to notice about it. One of them is that the writer says no good thing of himself. And he says only good of God. For after all, there are only two persons here. There was a lot of sin and a lot of involvement. David was involved with various persons and he'd sinned against a lot of people, against his country and against the people that trusted him. He had sinned a lot. There was a lot of involvement. But when David began to pray, he recognized

that all that involvement was secondary. The Primary Person is present here too, then, David, he saw that there were just two persons here. I against Thee, Thee only have I sinned. Against Thee and I. That's all David talked about.

Now, he said nothing good about himself. He offered no excuses. And he offered no defense. I believe this is greatly pleasing to God, to come to God without excuse, and without defense, I believe greatly pleases God. For God is pleased with some things and displeased with others that we do. And I believe the heart that comes to God without defense and without excuse, greatly pleases God. A woman who came to Jesus and asked him to do certain things for her. He looked at her in amazement and said, why, surely woman, great is thy faith. He was pleased with the woman. With others, He was displeased and said, oh ye of little faith. I think it's pleasing to God to come to Him without excuse, without defense.

Then, he says only good of God. He doesn't come to God whimpering or complaining or finding fault. He throws himself on God's mercy. And I believe that's the safest place in the universe, throw himself, throw ourselves on the mercy of God. From every stormy wind that blows, says Stowell's song, from every stormy wind that blows, from every swelling tide of woes, there is a calm, a sure treat: Tis found beneath the mercy seat.

Now, the mercy seat is not a poetic hiding place. The mercy seat has a sharp theological meaning. It is, it is the cross, it is the mercy seat where Christ sits. It means to throw ourselves on the mercy of God without excuse and without personal buildup and without defense, and without any whimpering or complaining against the treatment God has given us; to come to Him thanking Him for every good thing and admitting frankly we deserved every bad one and throw ourselves on the mercy of Gods.

You know, the problem with us is, and the reason that our good resolves don't last, it is a joke. It's a cartoonist joke it. It is the joke of the comedian and the funny paper and all the rest that we make a resolution and break it. But the reason Christians make these resolutions and break them, whether it's at New Year or whether it's sometime in the middle of the year at some convention or revival meeting, is inadequate repentance. Inadequate repentance, that's our trouble. To have sinned or be practicing sin and to know it and yet to be unable to feel sorry about it. I tell you, that's worse than cancer. That's worse than multiple sclerosis. Those things are physical, and they can even be healed, but you can't heal this.

To sin, to practice sin, to be living with sin on you and to know it, and you to be unable to feel sorry about it. And, in order to feel sorry and be too weak to amend, that's, that's inadequate repentance. And inadequate repentance always is a sandy foundation. And all of your good intentions will fall apart and you will not make any progress if there is inadequate repentance there. I say, to feel sorry for our sins and yet not to be able to make any changes, or to know we have sinned and yet not even to feel sorry, this is greatly to aggravate our evil and compound the felony. And then to admire ourselves and to defend ourselves, it's to deepen the intensity of sin and make it grave and critical. And I believe it's greatly to displease God.

And then while trying to repent, secretly to desire to continue in the thing we're trying to repent of. What inconsistency is this, what incongruous praying, what hypocrisy; that we're trying to repent and secretly intending not to repent at all, but to go back and do the same thing over again. And to be so little concerned even while we're repenting that we break off without concerned to eat or to sleep or to chat or to seek entertainment.

You know, Israel in the olden days when they were repenting, they put on sackcloth and ashes. Do you know what sackcloth is? It's a gunny sack we call it now. It's about as coarse a cloth as there is. Nobody would want to wear it. And if you wore it next to yourself, you'd be scratching continually and suffering after a while with a rash. And ashes, what about ashes? Nobody can say a good word for ashes. I can't think of a good word to be said for ashes.

And Israel put on sackcloth and threw ashes on their heads, up into their hair, down their necks and down over their bodies. Why did they do that? Was there some sanctifying virtue in the sackcloth? No, they didn't think that and you don't think that. Nobody does. Did ashes have anything in it, ashes. No, ashes have nothing. There's nothing in ashes or sackcloth. But what they meant was, O God, we have sinned and we mean to repent and we're trying to repent and we want to repent and we're willing to even lay aside even the common and legitimate pleasures. Even the legitimate pleasures, we relinquish them in order that you might know that we mean what we say. Instead of breaking off to eat or sleep or look at a TV program, why, they put sackcloth and sat and threw ashes on their heads. It looked silly, and it did not have any Biblical commandment. There was nothing in the law of Moses that they were to do it so far as I know. But they did it because they wanted themselves to know and they wanted God to know that their repentance was going to be adequate. They were ready to give up the legitimate things in order that they might make their repentance effective.

Now what is the uses, or are the uses of sorrow in repentance? For the Bible talks about sorrow and repentance. But I believe that sorrow chastens the soul. To sin and to get off easy and sin again and get off easy and to sin again and get off easy and continue, pretty soon you'll get a habit. You get a habit of it, to sin, commit the sin of omission. Any sin of omission and to get off easy, and then to commit it again and continue to commit it, pretty soon we've established tracks for our hearts to run on.

And because sin didn't cost us anything, but we cheerfully said, well, Jesus paid it all. He's forgiven me and it cost us nothing, we don't know how bad it is. We don't sense it. And so, sorrow is the chastening of the soul. Sorrow is the sackcloth. A man who had worn sackcloth for two or three days, he didn't forget it. And he hesitated twice before he went back to do that thing again, for he remembered the rash and the itching and sleepless nights and the sneezing from the ashes and the dust and gritty ashes in his hair, he remembers that. He punished himself a little.

Now, I know self-punishment does not atone for sin, but it does serve to make a man sick of it. And that's why Paul said there was a sorrow not to be repented of. He that sorrows unto repentance, sorrows with a sorrow not to be repented of. Nobody ever repented of having repented. Nobody ever did yet repent of having repented. And the chasing of the soul by the Holy Ghost in the sorrow of contrition, helps to cure us so we don't want to do this thing again. It's a kind of therapy, a cure, a psychological cure, to make us sick of the condition that we'd gotten ourselves into. I believe that we would do well my serious-minded friends. I believe we would do well we enter this, vibrant, living, dangerous new year, this threatening, luring new year, to enter it in a state of contrition.

But I would close by asking you to beware of contrition without hope. Because contrition without hope becomes remorse, and remorse is sick repentance. Judas did not repent. But Judas felt remorse. The repentance of the man Judas was a sick repentance and the result was he simply tormented himself to death, went out and committed suicide and knew the foretaste of hell before they went there. That's sick repentance, which is contrition without hope, I want to warn you against it. I want to warn you of the frivolity, the spiritual frivolity which allows you to go on and on carelessly on your way without checking on

yourself. But I also want to warn you, that if you allow yourself to become so serious and so heavy hearted, that there's no hope in it. Then your repentance is a sick repentance. It's self torment and it's not the repentance of faith.

True Repentance is three things. Let me give them to you and then we'll close. True repentance is a realistic self judgment, a realistic self judgment. I do not believe God is pleased to have me say worse things about myself and it is true, if indeed I could imagine anything worse than is true. I don't believe it pleases God. I have heard and I've smiled, I've heard young girls, say 14-15 years old, stand and testify, very emotionally moved and eloquently tell what vile wretches, what terribly depraved, deeply sinful and abandoned creatures they have been. And I smiled to myself and said, God bless the little honey. I suppose the worst thing she ever did in her life was slap her little sister or drink Coca Cola. But, you know, she was calling herself names, abusing herself because that was the proper thing to do you know, where she came from. That was the proper thing to do. Never, never lie about yourself, not even not even to please what you think is pleasing God. Be realistic in your self judgement. David said, let everyone, not David but Paul said, let every man think soberly of himself. Not more highly than they ought to, but soberly.

So, judge yourself. That's the word, judge yourself. Judgment isn't a 100% condemnation. Judgment is an appraisal of the depths of the guilt and the handing out of punishment in keeping with the degree of guilt. If it's only secondary murder, then they're not going to hang a man. They're going to give judgment according to the depths and degree and intensity of the sin. And so, we must be realistic about this thing. And then, when we've been judged ourselves realistically, we must make full determination to change, any sweet talk before God about how bad we are that isn't accompanied by a quiet determination to change, is not repentance at all, but nothing else.

Then there should be a third thing and that is a cheerful confidence in Christ. Ah, the devil must grind his ugly teeth together when he sees a Christian so penitential that he's tremblingly before his God and pleading for mercy, and yet sees a smile on his face at the same time. Because the smile is there, out of cheerful confidence in Jesus Christ the Lord. The same day that he wrote Psalm 51 he also wrote Psalm 103. And these are the words of Psalm 103. No remorse here. No sick penitence here, but wholesome sound repentance followed by cheerful hope and good expectation of God's forgiveness. The Lord is merciful, said this same David, and gracious, slow to anger and plenteous in mercy. He will not always chide, nag. Have you had friends about you, husband or wife or anybody, father, mother that would just nag continually? Your faults were a subject of continual nagging. God will not nag. He will not always chide. Neither will He keep His anger forever. He hath not dealt with us after our sins nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward them that fear Him. And as far as the east is from the west, so far hath He removed our transgressions from us.

When I first came to the city of Chicago, there was a great pulpit orator in this city by the name of Dr. Frederick Shannon. Maybe somebody would remember him. Dr. Frederick Shannon. He preached somewhere in one of the downtown churches. I used to hear him occasionally on the radio. He was one of the old-fashioned orators, an Irish orator. He would talk about the robin as the bird with the sun down on his breasts, I remember hearing him. And he said that once he was preaching in his church and there was a great retired professor of mathematics sitting down near the front. And he was preaching from the text, as far as the east is from the west so hath He removed our transgressions from us.

And he spoke out and said, Dr. So and So, how far is the east from the west? And he said, instinctively, the old man reached in his pocket, pulled out a pad and a pencil. Then he stopped, and put them in back and looked up at the preacher and grinned. You can't figure that Brother. How far is the east from West? Nobody knows. Not all the mathematicians in the world can tell you that. And that's how far God takes sin away. For like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pities them that fear Him. For He knoweth our frame. He remembers that we are dust. But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them them that fear Him, and His righteousness unto children's children. Bless the Lord ye His angels, blessing in all places of His dominion.

Let us enter the new year in a state of cheerful contrition. Before God, contrite always. But also, cheerfully hopeful that our God is forgiving, kind and loving and tender. He'll never deal with us as we deserve, but deal with us out of His own heart. That's my hope for this year, that I'll be dealt with out of God's heart. God will never look down and say let's look Tozer over, so we'll decide this year what to give him. Uh-uh! If He did, oh, I'd be remorseful to the place of sick, pathological penitence, but would never have hope. But He will look in His own heart and say, out of my heart, I decide how good I'm going to be to him.

So, that is our hope friends this year. God will treat you the way God is, not the way you are, provided of course that you have done as I've suggested here, that you have realistically judged yourself and determinedly changed to please the will of God and then cheerfully hope. I believe that God will keep us during this year, and that we shall grow in grace. We'll have His protection and His kind watchfulness in all the days ahead.

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